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A NEGLECTED PRINCIPLE OF LITURGICAL
REVISION

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The Second Report of the Joint Commission on the Book of Common Prayer is an interesting document, not only for the history of liturgy in the American Church but also in showing, perhaps more by implication than by direct statement, the lines along which thought in the Episcopal Church is at present moving.

The resolution of 1913 which created this Commission provides that "no proposition involving the faith and doctrine of the Church shall be considered or reported upon" by it. Yet no far-reaching change in liturgy can be made without reference to theological considerations, and many of these come out clearly in the Report. The main points where doctrinal influences are apparent are in connection with (1) the revision of the wording of certain Collects, with a tendency to eliminate or soften some of the harsher elements of the old doctrine of God's providence; (2) the Holy Communion; (3) the visitation and healing of the sick. These are scarcely questions to be settled without serious discussion of their theological implications, and it is difficult to imagine any previous generation supposing that they could be regarded from an exclusively liturgical point of view.

I. *The doctrine of God.* In the prayer "For Fair Weather," among the Prayers and Thanksgivings upon Several Occasions, it is suggested to change the reading so as to omit the bracketed portions:

"Almighty and most merciful Father, we humbly beseech Thee of thy great goodness, to restrain those immoderate rains wherewith [for our sins] Thou hast afflicted us. And we pray Thee to send us

such seasonable weather, that the earth may in due time yield her increase for our use and benefit [And give us grace that we may learn by thy punishments to amend our lives, and for thy clemency to give thee thanks and praise;] through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Still more striking is the substitute offered for the prayer
“In Time of great Sickness and Mortality.”

Present Form

O Almighty God, the Lord of life and death, of sickness and health, regard our supplications, we humbly beseech thee; and, as thou has thought fit to visit us for our sins with great sickness and mortality, in the midst of thy judgment, O Lord, remember mercy. Have pity upon us, miserable sinners, and withdraw from us the grievous sickness with which we are afflicted. May this thy fatherly correction have its due influence upon us by leading us to consider how frail and uncertain our life is; that we may apply our hearts unto that heavenly wisdom which in the end will bring us to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Proposed Form

O most mighty and merciful God, we flee unto thee for succor by reason of the grievous sickness that has come upon us. Deliver us, we beseech thee, from our peril; give strength and skill to all who are engaged in the care of the sick, and prosper the means which shall be made use of for their cure; and grant that, perceiving how frail and uncertain our life is, we may apply our hearts unto that heavenly wisdom which in the end will bring us to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The conclusion of the prayer “For a Sick Person” reads at present, “And in thy good time restore him to health and enable him to lead the residue of his life in thy fear and to thy glory. Or else give him grace so to take thy visitation, that after this painful life ended, he may dwell with thee in life everlasting.” It is revised to read, “in thy fear and to thy glory; and grant that finally he may dwell with thee in life everlasting.”

Very similar in idea is the change made in the prayer
 "For a Sick Child."

The Old Form

Almighty God, and merciful Father, to whom alone belong the issues of life and death, look down from Heaven, we humbly beseech thee, with the eyes of thy mercy upon the sick child for whom our prayers are desired. Deliver him, O Lord, in thy good appointed time from his bodily pain and visit him with thy salvation; that if it be thy good pleasure to prolong his days here on earth, he may live to thee and be an instrument of thy glory, by serving thee faithfully and doing good in his generation. Or else receive him into those heavenly habitations where the souls of those who sleep in the Lord Jesus enjoy perpetual rest and felicity. Grant this, O Lord, for the love of thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The New Form

O Heavenly Father, almighty and merciful, who lovest all children, and hast filled the world with gladness, pour out thy blessing, we beseech thee, upon the sick child for whom our prayers are offered. Guide by thy wisdom the efforts made for his cure, and mightily increase our confidence in thy love; that he, resting in our faith and sustained by thy power, may be made well and may live to thee in the joy of thy service; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the prayer "For a Person Under Affliction" the bracketed portions are to be omitted:

"O Merciful God and heavenly Father who hast taught us in thy holy Word that thou dost not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men, look with pity we beseech Thee upon the sorrows of thy servant, for whom our prayers are desired. [In thy wisdom thou hast seen fit to visit him with trouble and to bring distress upon him.] Remember him, O Lord, in mercy; [sanctify thy fatherly correction to him;] endue his soul with patience [under his affliction, and with resignation to thy blessed will]; comfort him with a sense of thy goodness; lift up thy countenance upon him and give him peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. "

The present prayer for Malefactors is to be dropped and a substitute is provided under the title "For Prisoners."

For Malefactors

O most gracious and merciful God, we earnestly beseech thee to have pity and compassion upon those persons recommended to our prayers, who now lie under the sentence of the law and are appointed to die. Visit them, O Lord, with thy mercy and salvation; convince them of the miserable condition they are in by their sins and wickedness; and let thy powerful grace produce in them such a godly sorrow and sincere repentance as thou wilt be pleased to accept. Give them a strong and lively faith in thy Son our blessed Saviour, and make it effectual to the salvation of their souls. O Lord, in judgment remember mercy; and whatever sufferings they are to endure in this world, yet deliver them, O God, from the bitter pains of eternal death. Pardon their sins and save their souls, for the sake and merits of thy dear Son, our blessed Saviour and Redeemer. Amen.

For Prisoners

O God who sparest when we deserve punishment, and in thy wrath rememberest mercy, we humbly beseech thee of thy goodness to comfort and succor all prisoners who are under reproach in the house of bondage (especially those who are condemned to die). Give them a right understanding of themselves and of thy promises; that trusting wholly in thy mercy, they may not place their confidence anywhere but in thee. Relieve the distressed, protect the innocent, awaken the guilty; and forasmuch as thou alone bringest light out of darkness and good out of evil, grant to these thy servants that by the power of thy Holy Spirit their souls may be set free from the chains of sin, and they may be brought to newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The "Thanksgiving for Deliverance from Great Sickness and Mortality" is to be dropped from the Prayer Book.

All these proposed emendations and omissions are directed against a theory of God and man which was fundamental to the authors of the Prayer Book. Our ancestors interpreted human life from an almost exclu-

sively moral point of view. Every man was a fallen creature, raised from complete corruption only by the grace of God working in him from the time of his baptism. His goal was heaven, his peril hell. The thing needful was to find the way of life which led to the one and avoided the other. For this purpose a moral economy existed in the universe which left no event without retributive or disciplinary effect on man. The apparent evils of life were notes of warning, its joys were messages of encouragement from the Power that worked in this world for the salvation of men's souls in the world to come. This theory was absolutely complete and compact, leaving no event unexplained or unrelated to the moral purpose of God.

The objection felt by moderns to this view was that a God who was responsible for many of the painful incidents of this life was neither lovable nor respectable, and that to save the Divine character it was necessary to sever from God's immediate control events which before had been regarded as his special instruments for realizing his purpose of bringing men to himself. The origin of this objection is to be found in the steady decline of the theory of man's corruption through Adam, and the fading of definiteness in the belief about the future. Late in the nineteenth century the biological doctrine of evolution was taken over into sociology and given a mystical turn by theologians who traced philosophical descent from Schelling and his school. The prevailing view of the conditions and destiny of humanity was completely changed; the joys of heaven and horrors of hell ceased to be factors in modern life; and this reacted on the ideas of God in that the feeling for the immediate practical necessity of adapting life to a fixed and known retributive system disappeared. It was felt that God in the rôle of a stern judge and wise disciplinarian of his fallen and worthless creatures could be held responsible for many things which, in

his new rôle of guide and support to humanity evolving from primitive savagery to ordered moral society, he could not assume without serious loss of respect.

It was the boast of modern liberal Protestantism that it set Christianity free from the fearsomeness and awe of the Calvinistic universe by reviving the primitive doctrine of the Fatherhood of God. The primitive character of the form in which this doctrine has been revived and popularized may be questioned, but its practical effect in sentimentalizing and weakening the ancient conception of God is unmistakable. God has been removed from the realms of the unpleasant, but the removal has been one of fiction and not of fact. Suffering and evil are still facts of life and form a problem for the theologians, the importance of which the war has not tended to minimize. The essence of theism is the attempt to interpret the behavior of the universe, taken as a whole, in its relation to human life. No theology can hope for permanent support which closes its eyes to all but one aspect of the world's behavior.

II. *The Holy Communion.* In the revision of the Order for the Holy Communion several important changes have been suggested. The title of the service is changed to "The Divine Liturgy, being the order for The Lord's Supper or Holy Eucharist, commonly called The Holy Communion." The Ten Commandments may be read in a shortened form. The Summary of the Law is changed to read, "with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength." The *Dominus vobiscum* is introduced before the Collects of the day. An anthem or hymn is admitted between the Epistle and Gospel. "Praise be to thee, O Christ," may be said after the Gospel. A rubric authorizing the celebrant to ask for "the secret intercessions of the congregation for any who have desired the prayers of the Church" is introduced before the prayer "For the Whole State of Christ's Church."

The word "Militant" no longer appears after "Christ's Church" in the invitation to that prayer, and the wording of the prayer is somewhat changed. The last of the "Comfortable Words" is amended to read, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and he is the Propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." The *Dominus vobiscum* is inserted before the *Sursum Corda*. The *Benedictus qui venit* is authorized after the *Sanctus*. Proper prefaces are inserted for the Epiphany, for the Annunciation, Purification, and Transfiguration, and for All Saints' Day. The Prayer of Humble Access is transferred to a place immediately after the Prayer of Consecration; the Lord's Prayer is placed before the administration of the elements and is introduced by the sentence, "As our Saviour Jesus Christ hath commanded and taught us, let us say —." Provision is made for the *Agnus Dei*, or for some other hymn or hymns, to be sung during the Communion. The Lord's Prayer before the Thanksgiving is dropped, and the latter is introduced by: "Having now received the Precious Body and Blood of Christ, let us give thanks to the Lord our God." A rubric is admitted authorizing a Deacon to read the ante-Communion service. The ablutions rubric is amended so as to provide for reservation: "If any of the consecrated bread and wine remain after the Communion, it shall not be carried out of the church, but shall immediately after the blessing be reverently consumed. But *Note*, That subject to the regulation of the Ordinary, the Priest may reserve so much of the consecrated bread and wine as may be required for the Communion of the Sick." Another important rubric is the following: "When for any reason it is deemed inadvisable to use the common cup in the administration, the Bishop may authorize the Priest to use the method of Intinction." The general impression given by these changes is an increase of emphasis on the

doctrine of the Real Presence. The admission of the *Agnus Dei* and the *Benedictus qui venit* are certainly in this direction, and the provision for reservation, though put in the form of a provision for the Communion of the sick, is really the legalizing of the long-continued practice in the American Church of reserving the sacrament for adoration as well as for use in Communion.

The provision for intinction would seem at first a triumph for the Broad Churchmen, but this is doubtful. Nothing has been more distracting from the service than the expedients which many of the clergy have adopted to preserve their congregation from the danger of infection through the chalice. Purificators, sometimes dipped in alcohol or water, have been flourished before the communicants between each communication. Elaborate announcements explaining the method of intinction and its necessity have been introduced into the service. It is not inconceivable that congregations will prefer to adopt the Roman method of communication in one kind to these odious interruptions of devotion.

More important than any change made in the service of Holy Communion itself is the introduction into the body of Collects, Epistles, and Gospels of a special Collect, Epistle, and Gospel for the Solemnization of Matrimony and for the Burial of the Dead. No special provision for the use of these is made in either the office for the Burial of the Dead or the Marriage Service. They could find natural place only in Nuptial and Requiem Masses.

The intellectual issue raised by the admission of Requiem Masses is apparent. For the Roman Church this practice has been a natural expression and outgrowth of the teaching of the sacrifice of the Mass. The Episcopal Church, however, following the Church of England, has always set itself against this teaching. The objection received classic form in the thirty-first of the Articles of Religion:

“The Offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone. Wherefore the sacrifices of Masses, in the which it was commonly said, that the Priest did offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, were blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits.”

If the practice of Requiem Masses is to be revived and authorized by the Church, some statement is surely called for, expressing either agreement or disagreement with Roman teaching on this subject and declaring the grounds on which a custom so long disused and disliked is revived.

This point has, of course, frequently been the subject of sharp controversy; but it is to be feared that the motive which has influenced both sides has been ritual rather than theological interest. It has become fashionable to have Requiem Masses, just as it has become fashionable to import many other Roman practices into the services of the Church, and those who favor these importations naturally desire support in the Prayer Book for what they do. The spirit of these men is very different from that of Newman and his followers, with whom theology was primary. Their object was to influence the mind of the Church to a fuller acceptance of what they believed to be Catholic teaching, and their weapons and defense were logic and argument. Their successors do not understand their theology, and endeavor to perpetuate their work by the revival of ceremonies rather than the discussion of principles.

III. *The Healing of the Sick.* In the office for the Visitation of the Sick, besides several changes of the same general nature as those proposed for the occasional prayers and thanksgivings, there is a cautiously worded rubric providing for auricular confession: “Then shall the sick person be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feels his conscience troubled in any matter; after

which confession, the Minister shall assure him of God's mercy and forgiveness."

More important is the Appendix inserted after the service of Visitation:

"Following the teaching and practice of Our Lord and his Apostles, the Church from the beginning hath exercised the Ministry of Healing, always with a prayer of Faith, often accompanied with anointing with oil or with the imposition of hands. When any sick person shall in humble faith desire this ministry through anointing or laying on of hands, the Minister may use such portion of the foregoing Office as he shall think fit, and the following form:

'O blessed Redeemer, relieve, we beseech thee, by thy indwelling power the distress of this thy servant; release him from sin and drive away all pain of soul and body, that being restored to soundness of health he may offer thee praise and thanksgiving; Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

I anoint thee with oil (lay my hand upon thee), in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, beseeching the mercy of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that all thy pain and sickness of body being put to flight, the blessing of health may be restored to thee.'"

It must be admitted at once that the revival of this custom has behind it the support of apostolic authority. Healing by the imposition of hands was an important feature of the ministry of Jesus, a feature which he strove to make subordinate to his preaching without much success so far as the multitude was concerned. The practice was continued by the apostles and was one of the recognized signs which witnessed the Divine power which possessed them. Exorcism by the use of various formulæ, by the imposition of hands, and with anointing of oil, was a recognized function of the Catholic ministry throughout the Middle Ages. Yet the fact that the healing ministry has existed in Christianity does not mean that it was distinctively Christian. It was the universal accompaniment of a particular theory of disease, viz., that disease is the result of demonic influence or possession. Jesus

claimed no exclusive power either for himself or his followers in effecting these cures. The whole point of the Beelzebub controversy is lost if others did not perform cures in the same way: "If I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out." Every cure was a struggle of supernatural forces, in which the holy (or friendly) spirit permitted itself to be used by the healer to overcome the influence of an evil (or hostile) spirit.

What can be said, however, in defense of the revival of these practices without the revival of the theory of disease which gave them birth? An intellectual difficulty of some proportions faces the Church if it is to revive the healing ministry of apostolic times. Is the Church to reaffirm the doctrine of demon possession, or is some new theory of diagnosis to be proposed as a complement to the revival of ancient therapeutics? The objection to a skeptical attitude in regard to faith-healing will always be raised, that these cures often really work and that many people are actually made better. It is quite true that a healthy equilibrium may be restored to an overwrought nervous system by the removal of worry, and that this can be achieved by the states of faith and hope induced by the faith-cure. It is also true that other methods of removing worry are equally successful. It has been found that many troubles which have been regarded as organic are really due to disturbances in the nervous system. These can be cured by an improvement in the nervous condition of the patient, which may be effected by a faith cure. These faith cures are in all cases dependent, as the name suggests, on the belief in their effectiveness. Without this nothing can be accomplished. The real harm in the faith cure is not that it works by virtue of convincing people that their condition is other than it is, but because it tends to depreciate the accurate investigation of disease and its cure by science. People are always ready to welcome short cuts to knowledge, and religion has been the most

attractive of all. In none of the spheres in which it has been applied has the method of observation and investigation yielded more fruitful and beneficial results than in medicine. To attempt to depreciate this work or to offer substitutes for it that are not founded on fact is to stand in the way not only of scientific progress but of the preservation and advancement of human life.

As a piece of liturgical reconstruction the Report is undoubtedly admirable. The Church will, however, be making a serious error if it accepts or rejects its suggestions merely on that basis, and permits the theological issues raised by many of the proposed changes to escape, if not settlement, at least a more general fruitful discussion than they have yet received. The whole question of prayer could profitably be opened, and the propriety considered of having petitions to change the weather and the states of people's health used by a generation which believes neither change capable of being made by supernatural interference with the course of nature. This suggests the still wider question of whether the Church ought any longer to teach prayer as a species of contract, in which man induces God, as it were against his better judgment, to manage things differently from the way in which He had originally intended. It is hardly possible to see how this view can be reconciled with the modern idea of nature as a fixed sequence of events. Questions like these are fundamental "modern needs," which the Church cannot afford to neglect if she is any longer to pretend to minister to the educated. Liturgy, to be a real aid to devotion, must express the experiences and aspirations of its users. It cannot do this if it exalts flagrant misrepresentations of facts and embodies anciently respectable but really untrue views.